

ICPS newsletter

Heralding more flexible educational systems

The world is going through another revolution, with text culture being replaced by a screen-oriented one that is establishing new rules for social order. These changes in society will force changes to educational systems, as well. What components of the old systems are worth preserving, and what directions should be chosen by our education today in order to gain competitive advantages in tomorrow's globalised world? The newspaper Den' (The Day) recently published an interview on this topic with ICPS's deputy director, Volodymyr Nikitin

– What is happening in education, is it just cosmetic surgery or really deep drastic changes?

– According to importance and scale of changes, **our education is today experiencing something similar to what happened in human consciousness during the Renaissance.** But now these changes are happening much more rapidly. Education is always undergoing profound changes, and now we are living exactly in the time of such a turning point. In the age of Enlightenment, the form of organising the studying process changed, with the appearance of the system of classrooms and lessons that is still effective today, and the subject-oriented form of teaching began to be shaped. Subject-oriented education is based on singling out the objects of a given discipline; for example, physics studies physical bodies, while chemistry studies chemical processes.

We should look at changes in education from the historic perspective. Nowadays, our pedagogy has got caught up in an endless loop of subject-oriented teaching, but far from all forms of knowledge can be presented as individual subjects. That is why the predominance of the “subject-oriented school” and classroom-and-lesson system is now in decline. They have ceased to accomplish those new objectives that have emerged before education. It is absolutely impossible to transfer the practical skills of mastering a computer into a subject called “Computer Studies”, as it is not a subject but a technology, and technologies cannot be studied as subjects. Mastering a technology is gained through training. Technologies operate with simple standard units that are combined according to defined rules, thus creating something new.

– Then which components of our educational system should be changed, and which preserved?

– The information society has taken the place of the knowledge-based society.

Earlier, the highest value was knowledge. This does not mean that in information society knowledge is not needed anymore; it simply gained another function. Earlier, knowledge was collected around the idea of the object being studied, and had an integral form. Thanks to the “knowledge-oriented” form we have a complete image of world that constituted our worldview. In its turn, information is knowledge taken apart into pieces. In information society, the whole is destroyed, and it is reconstructed directly in the searching systems of the Internet; meanwhile, navigation in the Web has become the essential skill which can be compared to the old ability to read and understand text. The **new information-oriented culture is fundamentally a non-textual one; it is a screen culture.** We can notice this even at the level of everyday life. People have begun to read much less, and their attitudes to the texts themselves and to their quality has changed. Communicating in “chat-rooms”, young people rather often use ready-made pictograms instead of words. To read a text means to be able to reconstruct the context, along with references to other texts. But nowadays a message can consist of only simple sets of phrases. That is why readers prefer action and do not understand “all those nature descriptions”.

– How can the rise of a new culture influence our education system?

– Certainly, with the coming of a new culture the very context of education changes. In the previous culture, it was science that directly constituted the context for education. We were trained for theoretical thinking in order to be capable of scholarship or becoming engineers possessing the theoretical background (all calculations were based on theoretical ones). It was crucial for society to find and single out those who in future will appear capable of becoming high-professional scholars or engineers.

But presently it is participation in information technologies that becomes the new context of education. Nowadays it is not things but combinations of virtual units that are changing as elements of the world; and publicists oppose the virtual world to the real one. In my opinion, this is a mistake. Only the Lord God knows the real world as such, while we perceive it in so-called realities (that is, in different forms of describing the world). The virtual world is juxtaposed not to the real world but to the ideal world, that is, the world of ideas. It is science that constitutes this world of ideas, and presently it is time to speak about diminution of the role of the world of ideas.

Other worlds exist, as well—for example, the world of impossible or imaginary things. There exist symbols, myths, and archetypes. Or it is the world of action based on organisational schemes. And there is the show-world—a virtual world where all images can be combined at will. Nowadays, virtual world has become a market one. The book *The Society of the Spectacle (La société du Spectacle)* was written in 1968 by the French philosopher and film director Guy Debors. Its main message is that **images became commodities and all the future economy will be based not on the sale of goods but on the sale of images.** As during production the image does not collide with the resistance of materials, like goods production does, it is much easier to change it. The image market is evolving much faster. Old things have remained as well, but from above a market based on image exchange was built on. The biggest money is now circulated in the world of shows, the world of entertainment. There has even appeared a new economy—the economy of show-business.

– Does the new culture influence the social structure of our society?

– When speaking about a newly created screen-oriented culture, it also has its own social structure. There is a group of people who cease to tell virtual and real worlds apart. They live in the screen and things that happen there make up their life more than those that happen to those people in their real life. There exist “users”—those who use things received from the screen professionally and owing to this accomplish some socially useful work. Some people serve

the screen itself—present data on it, design different technologies; we call them programmers. Some others appear directly on the screen—I mean actors, commentators. And there are those who exist beyond the screen and manage this world of information movement. Strictly speaking, the education system will begin later to divide everybody precisely by these groups.

Subject-oriented pedagogy is nowadays being replaced by an imitation game one. It enables people to master technologies. While studying just subjects one can enter only the “knowledge” education. However, it is impossible to train people who are located beyond the screen by means only of imitation pedagogy, though they also need it as a technical means. Subject-oriented, “knowledge” education is necessary for them too. In the former USSR (though the Western World thrust this on us too), education was perceived only in the context of social justice, based on the principle “to give everybody equally”. In fact, the concept of **equal access to high quality education means creation of a network of “educational McDonald’ses”**. **This may be not bad, yet then we should forget about the art of cookery and health.**

A fundamentally different concept of equality is the concept of equal starting conditions, equal opportunities, anticipating that social inequality is the outcome of the use of these equal opportunities. I mean that everyone will get in the end what she or he achieved. The equality of starting conditions cannot mean equality of results. By the way, there exists one more completely different type of equality—equality of access to education management; that does not mean equal access to creating one’s own trajectory of education.

There are different forms of entering the tradition where your family and your nation reside. The leaders of national or cultural elites are responsible for this. In its turn, the state should be responsible for an education system capable of training worthy citizens for their country. Such an education should give everybody an idea about the norms within which one may and should act, as well as accomplish defined social work necessary for the state. Promoting people technologically is a task of technological corporations. In the entire world, new types of education are being developed by technological corporations at technological universities. Presently, here in Ukraine there is not a single university attached to some big corporative system, while in the United States big corporations produce certain products and have their own universities; for example, the universities of General Motors or Motorola. Such companies train

experts for themselves at their own universities, and they do not even orient on a given average educational level of academic institutions in their country.

In the core of a modern European or American university there is knowledge (classical school), and around this classical school there are created various managerial, business schools, etc., where completely different educational systems work, other systems of teacher training, the educational process itself is organised in a different way. It is a mine of new things. If one “walks along” such an educational system, she or he may gain different types of professional training. In our country, there was a tendency to limit the legacy of the educational system struggling to make it unified. And today we all try hard to find an ideal and efficient option in education, at the same time destroying everything old without pity. In Japan, in the middle of the 20th ct. after World War II, when it was necessary to change the educational system drastically, pedagogues were not allowed to participate in the discussion. The educational system was chosen by politicians, scientists, and financiers. When the decision was made it was delivered to teachers to be implemented.

– *What is your vision for the educational system today?*

– The educational system should be diverse and enable movement in different ways and trajectories. There can be no standard educational system identical for everyone. Vassilii Zhukovsky, the well-known Russian poet and teacher of the tsar’s children, created his own system of training successors to the throne. This system entailed very strict rules, based on self-restraint. He told the tsar’s heirs that to belong to aristocracy means not privilege but responsibility. The tsar’s children slept with opened windows on narrow beds, covered with overcoats. They ate food brought from the barracks. In such a way, they were prepared to rule the country. This concerns the royal managers. The universities trained its own advisors.

In the book *The Planet of the Apes*, the society depicted in it was divided in three groups. The first one—the orangutans—were scientists and teachers who preserved tradition. The second one—chimpanzees—introduced innovations. And the third one was made up of gorillas, who made decisions. The gorillas listened to the orangutans and chimpanzees and then took the responsibility for making decisions and implementing them.

Our trouble is that in our country we have not yet trained reliable analysts to be able to provide decision-makers with high-quality

analysis of events. Those who make decisions nowadays mostly have to do it blindfolded.

– *Why it is necessary to train decision-makers “in the heat of battle”?*

– Because willpower should be their main virtue, and it is struggle and harsh conditions that cultivate this virtue. In English private schools where the country’s elite was raised, there were, in fact, two main subjects—football plus Greek or Latin. Studying dead languages was to some extent similar to studying mathematics, as it trained abstract thinking. Little attention was paid even to economics and geography. However, in other times the elite was brought up with big assignments and obligations; the more knowledge, the lesser the ability to act. And the more doubts, the more uncertainty. Decisions needing to be made with a lack of information require a completely different type of thinking, a different preparation.

– *Not everyone prepares her- or himself for being elite, while everyone needs an education. What in this new world is essential in education for everyone?*

– Life-long learning, which has already become a reality. I mean retraining connected with the rapid change of technologies. In a new society it is necessary to be able to integrate into technological schemes and find your place within technological cycles. The major task of modern education is to create a system containing different elements—those of information and knowledge training, profession skills, elements of traditional relations in the country. Education has appeared for those who have a lot of free time, for example, universities for pensioners.

Many things that happen nowadays I, as a man of textual culture and ideal reality, do not like at all, but they are taking place in the world and it is not wise to ignore the changes that occur—**it makes sense for me to struggle to preserve diversity, and not for the victory of the best option.**

Presently in the world, fierce competition is observed between educational systems. Some of them will become central ones in the network information society. The education system to become a central one will possess universal content and the ability to be presented in international markets will have some unique features connected with the history and traditions of the nation. By the way, nowadays the most rare and, unfortunately, the most limited resource of information society is the traditions of the nations and their culture—that is, scientific, art, and technical culture. If Ukraine succeeds in developing proper technologies of its utilisation, it will be able to take one of the central places among the world’s best educational systems. ■

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